



מרכז עזרי לחקר איראן והמפרץ הפרסי
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A preliminary evaluation of the Iran protests: causes, characteristics, scope and responses.

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A preliminary evaluation of the Iran protests: causes, characteristics, scope and responses

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Abstract

In the last days of December 2017 and the first days of January 2018 Iran experienced the most significant wave of protests since the riots that erupted following the 2009 presidential election. These have now abated, but it is too soon to decide if they will not resurface very quickly. Given that they have abated it is appropriate to express a preliminary analysis of the causes, characteristics, scope and responses. This paper does so as a collective effort of Fellows and Members of the Ezi Center for Iran & Persian Gulf Studies, University of Haifa.

Introduction

The current wave of demonstrations in Iran, which began on Thursday, December 28, 2017 have already been victorious in the expression of democracy, by changing the rhetoric, in giving voice to millions of Iranians we have not heard from for a few decades and in attracting the world's attention even if they have not yet resulted in the overthrow of the Islamic Republic.

On the one side there is the Islamic regime, armed with the Revolutionary Guard, the police and the Basij forces. On the other side there are the demonstrators, armed with increasing enthusiasm and a strong desire to bring about a real change in the political order in Iran but lacking visbleadership and a cohesive ideology.

They are not limited to Tehran, and occur in parallel in a large number of cities throughout the country. Thus far the protest movement does not pose an immediate threat to the stability of the Iranian regime, but it highlights the frustration of the Iranian population and the increasing gap between the citizens and the institutions of the revolution.

The demonstrations are not the scale of the serious protests that broke out in Iran in 1999 and 2009, but they underline the continued dissatisfaction of large parts of the population with the regime, which emphasizes its illegitimacy in the eyes of many people.

Unlike the events of 2009, which were led by leaders of the reform movement and were primarily political in nature, the current protests had no recognized leadership and combined a demand for improvement in the economic situation with a demand for greater political and social freedoms.

History shows that once the people have spoken then change is inevitable. The Ayatollah Khamenei and President Rouhani shouldn't ignore the inevitable. The longer they wait the more likely there is for a violent rather than peaceful change. This is especially after Khamenei predicted in his January 9 2018 speech that more protests would erupt in the future.

The current situation is an opportunity for the Iranian leadership to take advantage of the recent protests to advance practical solutions that meet the demands of the public and not disregard the deep social and demographic processes underway in Iran. Some important questions arising are:

Would any reforms be enough to make a difference for Iranian citizens? Would it change two apparently mutually exclusive forms of identity – *Iranianism* and *Islamism*? Has the Islamic Republic of Iran become the harbinger of the destruction of the Iranian clergy, both in the minds of the Iranian people and as a political force? Have the clergy become so crippled by association with the horrors and corruption of the Islamic Republic that they have lost all moral authority with the man in the street? On the other hand would there be an upsurge in orthodox clerical opposition to the Islamic Republic in response to this uneasy experiment in Shia political activism?

Should a change materialize peacefully or not then the field would be open for speculation on local, regional and global implications. It would be an opportunity to overturn the apple cart in relations with the Sunni world and Saudi Arabia, with supposed proxies Hamas and Hezbollah, with intervention in Syria and Yemen and globally with the West. It would change the worst case scenario that faces America and Israel to have a non-binding, non-enforceable, non-verifiable international agreement on nuclear development and missiles or war.

1. The scope of the protests

Although the number of protesters in a single city is not as high as what it was during the Green Movement of 2009-2010, this time the protests were much more widely spread. Unlike the 2009 protests the new wave of demonstrations started not in Tehran; they began in Mashhad the

holiest city in Iran to the Shiites, where the Imam Reza is buried, 8th in the chain of 12 Shi'ite imams.

By the second day, on Friday there were protests in more than 25 large and small cities including Kermanshah and Qom (the site of Shi'a leadership and religious schools in Iran) and Ahwaz in the south and Rasht in the north. After ten days, it was reported that there had been protests in more than a hundred cities and towns. The first reported fatalities were in Douroud, a small city in Lorestan province where a large portion of the population is armed.

The fact that the protests were more scattered - and this is the first time this characteristic is apparent in the last 30+years - has made their oppression much more difficult for the regime. The demonstrators were also much more diverse gender-wise, age-wise, education-wise, and social class-wise.

The regime has only a limited power to tackle such widespread discontent, some of which is currently busy in Syria and Iraq. It prefers to keep most of its formidable forces in Tehran and one or two large cities to defend the government offices, radio and television and strategic areas. It was not inclined to send its most formidable forces to other cities to suppress the demonstrations.

Most of the security forces that are in the small cities and towns are staffed by locals, so it is not easy for them to shoot their own brothers and sisters, which means the government had to redeploy forces from other cities, a process that takes time. Sociologically, family and even tribal relations are much stronger in these rural areas than in Tehran or other large cities, thus just one fatality can sometimes result in a much larger uprising.

2. Characteristics of the protests

Participants in this wave of protests have employed slogans never heard before in such a context. The protesters didn't distinguish between conservatives and reformists, but rather rejected the entire regime, with all its factions, in disgust. The protesters shouted "Reformists, Fundamentalist, this time you're done", "Death to the Revolutionary Guards", "Death to Khamenei" and "Death to Rouhani" the later who in August 2017 was re-elected by a majority vote and ostensibly represents the reformist camp.

The slogans are not only against the current regime but also express support and yearning for the Pahlavi dynasty deposed in the 1979 Revolution which is a surprising and a most daring innovation. In Qom, the Shi'i Vatican, and one of the epicenters of the Islamic Revolution in the 1978-79 protesters shouted "Reza Shah, may your soul rest in peace", "Iran without Shah is in ruins", and "O! The Shah of Iran, come back to Iran", an apparent referral to the crown prince Reza Pahlavi who has been living in exile in the US.

It is of specific significance that protesters chanted "Reza shah, may your soul rest in peace" in Mashhad, in front of the Goharshad mosque. When in the 1935 Reza Shah ordered men to take off their turban and traditional hats and wear new, French hats, and just before he banned hijab all together, thousands of religious people and some clergy took refuge there and staged a sit-down in opposition to Reza Shah's modernizing and secular policies. Reza Shah's troops attacked the mosque and massacred an estimated 800-2000 people. Now that people call for Reza Shah's soul to rest in peace in front of that very mosque, has a lot to say.

After being disappointed by a number of pragmatist and reformist governments (Rafsanjani, 1989-1997, Khatami, 1997-2005, and Rouhani, 2013-present), the popular opposition movement seems to have ceased to put any hope in such governments, and finally realizes that the reformists are supporting the same regime that the radicals or the conservatives support, and might only differ with them in terms of the best means to prolong the continuation of the regime.

It is because of this mistrust in the reformists that, on the one hand, during this last round of popular protests people called not only "death to the dictator" and "death to Khamenei," but even "death to Rouhani", while on the other hand slogans of support of the former Pahlavi regime - mainly its founder, Reza Shah, and its current Prince Royal, Reza Pahlavi II - could be heard.

2.1 Is there a protest leadership?

Unlike previous protests where we saw leaders of the reformist faction publicly supporting the protest of the Iranian street, we have not seen any internal factor in Iran supporting the protests. It is possible that the reformists, led by Rouhani, are aiming to take control but it is also possible that the calls are against the entire regime (and not only against the conservatives).

This would explain the lack of any one figure of any one faction being on the streets because this will only be interpreted as a struggle between the factions in support of regime change. It seems more and more that the protests this time around go beyond the struggle between the factions of

the regime and support for one faction or another, and that they are more in opposition to the regime in all its factions.

The street protests not having a visible leadership is both a weakness of this wave of protests but is also an advantage. The regime cannot put an end to the protests by targeting the leadership and/or guide it to whatever way suits the Mullahs by forcing or using coercion over the leaders. The initial protests in Tunisia and Egypt during the Arab Spring were in a similar mode.

Both there and then and now in Iran popular discontent can be viewed through the use of overwhelming majority of social networks in fanning and organizing protests. For example Telgram, whose use is very common in Iran, has seen information been distributed as to where and at what time to gather to protest against the regime. This is what led a Friday sermon in Tehran to call for the abolition of these networks in imitation of the Chinese model, where there is an independent Internet network disconnected from the Internet.

3. Why did the riots broke out now?

The cost of living is always a cause for demonstrations, protests and riots especially in cold winters. Other often cited causes are anniversaries, and student activism. There are, of course, other factors, some political local or regional, some are the relations between mosque and state, some are even environmental (the regime's failure to deal with environmental problems). Whatever the starting catalysts there is no doubt that all causes add up at the end of the day. Unless addressed then change will take place.

3.1 Economics

Since the lifting of the sanctions following the nuclear agreement (July 2015), the Iranian people have not seen a significant improvement in their economic situation - contrary to Rouhani's promises and the deflation of billions of dollars from frozen funds. Rather there has been a deterioration in it where the Iranian currency continues to lose its value (currently about 4300 tomans to \$ 1).

This is worsened by corruption that has reached monstrous dimensions while the allocation of resources has increased to foreign causes for the regime's activities for example the support of the Assad regime in Syria, the Shi'ite government in Iraq, Hezbollah in Labanon, Hamas and the

Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and Houthis in Yemen. This has not led to the improvement domestically of the situation of the Iranian people. More than 40 percent of the population are young people (aged 20-44) where not all are suitably employed.

There is a lack of a proper management of the economy. It is being mainly mishandled by unqualified people who are appointed on the basis of their closeness to the regime. There has been increasing central control over the economy correspondingly with the filling of the pockets of the heads of the regime and the government, increased allocation of funds to religious institutions and revolutionary institutions in the new budget introduced in December 2017, while other areas were cut. For example there has been an increase of 40% in the price of eggs, which is a basic consumer product.

3.2 Iranian regional projection

The slogan shouted by the protesters “No Gaza, no Lebanon, my soul will die for Iran’ has a direct connection to Iran's growing involvement not only in financial and logistical support in Gaza (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) and in Lebanon (Hezbollah), but also in Syria (the Assad regime), Iraq (the Shiite-led government), and Yemen (the Houthis).

This involvement has not only resulted in an increasing number of casualties of Iranian Mujahideen (apart from the non-Iranian Shi'ite mercenaries), but has already wasted billions of dollars from the Iranian state, in circumstances where the bulk of the Iranian people is collapsing under the weight of the deteriorating economic situation

The explanation for this seems to be a combination of several main factors. May we suggest that the progressive liquidation of ISIS also known as Da'ash was an important catalyst? On November 21 2017 the Iranian IRGC Qods Force commander Qassem Suleimani announced the liquidation of Da'ash. Despite this declaration the Islamic regime led by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei didn't approve any cutting in the costs of the trans-national Shiite militia system. On the contrary Iran has stepped up its aid. The Iranian population pay for these at the expense of their standard of living, a legitimate cause to demonstrate and riot especially in a cold winter.

Hamas and Hezbollah that Israel knows operating in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria are a tip of the iceberg. There are the Houthis in Yemen and the Fatimiyoun (Afghan Shiites). Some of whom are Afghan migrant workers in Iran, and some who are Afghans recruited in Afghanistan. Although the Islamic regime claims that it is a holy mission in the form of guarding the tomb of Zaynab, it has

been proven that this is a purely political mission - the rescue of Assad's regime. These mercenaries were recruited thanks to economic incentives.

In addition to this militia, the Iranian IRGC also operates militias composed of Pakistanis (Zainabiyoun) and Iraqis. The majority of whom are subordinate to umbrella organizations, al-Hashad al-Sha'bi, and local Syrian militias and even Indian Malaysians.

Money may not be everything but it is when the average Iranian is suffering. Local politics are linked to money in this regard for example through the death of former President Rafsanjani's. Rafsanjani was a balancing figure in the regime; he was careful to preserve the republican character of the regime, and warned that emphasizing the Islamic character alone would keep the public away from the regime.

President Rouhani has been unable to replace Rafsanjani in the eyes of the public. On the contrary as has been evident from his statements in recent months, where he has expressed support for Iran's expansion program in the region, in which Iran finances various and diverse militias. This is at the expense of the standard of living of the average Iranian.

3.3 Diverse domestic discontent

There is another explanation that the current wave of protests was not only over some financial issues, and the demonstrators are not only the underprivileged. In Tehran for example so far the protests have been local; meaning that people are protesting in the neighbourhoods in which they live. In the last few days of the recent protests most of the demonstrations in Tehran, have been concentrated in neighbourhoods with residents belonging to middle class and upper middle class socio economic status.

Northern Amir Abad for example is a middle class to upper middle class neighbourhood while Yousef Abad is an upper middle class neighbourhood. And besides that, we have also seen students at the University of Tehran protesting inside the University and chanting "Reformists, conservatives, the story is over (we are done with you)".

3.4 Environmental security

A third and valid explanation is environmental security. Today environmental security issues are part and parcel of every conflict in the Middle East. For example, one cannot understand the

genocide in Darfur without taking note of the desert which advanced 100km southward in 40 years, thus drying up wells and put the Arab pastoralist tribes in conflict over land and water with the Black African agriculturalists.

One cannot understand the breakout of conflict in 2011 in Syria without taking into account the 6 years of harsh drought that preceded it and hit the northeast and southeast parts of the country, dried up wells and with it also the sources of livelihood of the local population. Thus, about a million and a half people were forced to move to the big cities in search of livelihood thus putting a lot of pressure on dwindling natural resources. So, there was no wonder that the first foci of the rebellion against the Assad regime were in Dar'a and the northeast part of Syria.

In these cases and more (for example, Mali and Yemen), the conflicts were driven not only by political, socio-economic and ethnic tensions, but also by environmental stresses, which exacerbated existent problems to a boiling point. This is especially so when the ruling regimes were unable or didn't want to address or mitigate its effects on the population.

So too in Iran, the Iranian government has been unable to address environmental issues or, even worse still, mismanaged dealing with water resources. This could be seen very clearly in the case of Lake Urmia in northwestern Iran. It used to be the largest lake in the Middle East and the sixth-largest saltwater lake worldwide with a surface area of approximately 5,200 square kilometers, a length of 140 km, a width of 55 km and a maximum depth of 16 meters. Nowadays, Lake Urmia has shrunk to 10% of its original size due mainly to the mismanagement of water resources by the Iranian government, which has been damming the rivers flowing into it and pumping groundwater from the surrounding area.

In addition, drought prevailing in the Lake Urmia basin for many years has caused the surface area of the lake to decline and the level salinity to grow. As a result, the increase in the levels of salinity has led the local population to abandon their agricultural lands which have served as their main source of income, and to migrate in search of other sources of income. This has increased the level of unemployment among them as well as the feeling that they are being discriminated against by the Iranian government.

The situation is even more complicated since about 6.5 million people live in the Lake Urmia basin and most of them are Azeris. They regard the Iranian government mismanagement of Lake Urmia as a way to force them in purpose to migrate from their lands and to lose their source of income.

Thus, from 2009 onwards, the local population has protested a few times against the policies of the Iranian government concerning Lake Urmia.

Water security is another environmental issue that bothers Iran. Already in December 2013, Hamid Chitchian, head of the Ministry of Energy, stated that the water's sector situation had reached critical levels. In July 2013, IssaKalandari, the minister of agriculture, said to Ghanoon Newspaper that "the water crisis is the main problem that threatens Iran and that it is more dangerous than Israel, the US or political fighting among the Iranian elite". He further said that "if the water crisis is not addressed, Iran could become uninhabitable and a ghost town". He also warned that 50 million Iranians would be left without water, due to the exhaustion of 70% of Iran's groundwater and the diversion of rivers. This will drive peasants off the land to cities which already suffer from very high levels of unemployment.

This water crisis has also played a role in the current protests. On January 2, 2018, Radio Farda posted a smartphone video showing a mob burning the police station in the village of Ghahdarijan, which is located 24 km from the city of Isfahan. The grievance of the residents was that the river ZayandehRud dried up before reaching the village and Isfahan, the victims of Iran's mismanagement of its dwindling water resources.

Another case in point is the severe air pollution in urban areas caused by vehicle emissions, refinery operations and industrial effluents. Tehran, home to nearly 14 million residents, is one of the world's most polluted cities and every year it suffers from a phenomenon caused by cold temperatures called "temperature inversion", through which a layer of warm air above the city traps pollution. However, this year the air pollution reached unprecedented levels and as a result, all schools in Tehran were closed for few days in mid-December 2017 and 412 residents died as a result of air pollution in 23 days during this period. Thus, it is no wonder that the feeling of the urban residents is that the Iranian government does not do anything to solve the situation.

To sum up, Iran's environmental issues have played a role as a cause and as a catalyst in the recent protests. Sometimes, their breakout has been a direct cause for Iranians' grievances and protests as in the case of the village of Ghahdarijan and sometimes it has emphasized the water resources mismanagement by the Iranian government and its inability to resolve environmental issues that bothered the whole population, such as air pollution. Thus, there is a need to deal in a comprehensive way with the needs of the Iranian population, including the environmental ones.

3.5 Mosque and state

Yet another factor that contributed to discontent was that the government in Iran is a struggle between mosque and state. Understanding the governance of Iran through the study of Persian and Iranian cultural, literary and intellectual history and the role this has played in interpretations of political and clerical authority rests in part in the wide diversity of the lives and works of certain key figures in modern day Iran.

This ranges from those who articulated the country's responses to European imperialism, such as Mirza Malkom Khan, a prominent modernist, to the ideologues of the Islamic revolution of 1979. These include Jalal Al-e Ahmad and the left-leaning zealots and poets who used a mix of Marxism, Islamism, the Shia tropes of martyrdom and Frantz Fanon's third-worldism to give Iran's Islamic revolution its distinctive characteristics. Another facet and maybe more important is the big themes in Iran's history dominated by it being a Shia powerhouse state.

In all of these there are competing tensions within Persian Shiism of temporal and spiritual legitimacy, intertwined with messianic revivalism, mysticism and dissent. Persian Shia political philosophy creates a natural separation of mosque and state, as long as the state allows freedom and safety of Shia religious practice.

Until 1979 the state or moreover the crown had the upper hand. The clergy were there to preach, educate and sit in judgment on the nation's souls. A politically active clergy was, and still is for many leading Shia thinkers, a heretical innovation. Then in 1979 things changed and the clergy dominated over the state after the removal of the crown.

Ayatollah Khomeini's doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, the "guardianship of the jurist", and its application as the ideological and constitutional blueprint for the Islamic revolution, was the first time in Iran's Shia history that the clergy had explicitly articulated a theory of government. Before that they always preferred to remain scholarly and juristic.

An explanation why the clergy launched the 1979 Islamic Revolution is as an act of revenge because Shiism was derided under the Pahlavi monarchs and sidelined in the dash to achieve Western modernity after the discovery of oil. It was not a complete triumph, for the 1979 revolution and its aftermath crushed the clergy's centuries-old independence from the state. Their bid for power challenged the very soul of Persian Shia orthodoxy.

Given that the revolutionary generation of the clergy has been supplanted by the next due to mortality leaves us wondering about the ultimate place of the Islamic clergy in the government of Iran. How might the relations between mosque and state develop? Just wondering has been strengthened by the recent street demonstrations of discontent.

This shows that the writing might, one assumes, be on the wall to demote the clergy. The clergy have seen this potential and in attempt to placate it have recently relaxed regulations in the dress code for women. However this is not enough.

4. Will the regime topple?

The regime in Iran doesn't enjoy the support of a specific ethno-religious community. Most of its supporters either support it out of some ideological or religious reasoning or because they get paid to do so. So, when the moment of truth arrives, many of them will stop supporting the regime; those getting paid first, and those who do it due to ideological reasons, at least many of them, will not be persistent enough ideologically to kill thousands of their brethren in the streets.

Past experience in Iran shows that there is mood for a change but to succeed but it needs a cross-spectral coalition and this was lacking. The protests were circling in the bazaar without the apparent active participation of intellectuals and clerics. If these don't join the demonstrators in the future, then it will be difficult to bring about a real change in the current regime in Iran.

4.1 Will there be a revolution?

If there is a revolution it will be the elites, who have houses and businesses abroad, who will be the first who leave the country when they see a danger, just like what happened in the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79. The country will thus be worse off then before. Peaceful changes are better than a revolution!

Others, especially some foreign-based Persian journalists and analysts have been trying to frighten people by implying that Iran could become a second Syria. This can easily be refuted as scare mongering. While in Syria an ethno-religious minority sees the fall of Assad's regime as a matter of life and death for the whole community and thus does everything in its power to defend it, the situation in Iran is different.

Moreover, while in Syria a large portion of opposition is made up of Sunni Islamists opposing a non-religious (though not secular either) regime, in Iran, secular-majority opposition is up against a Shi'i Islamist regime.

The possibility that Iran becomes the battlefield of regional and world powers is also very low. It is unlikely that Russia would defend the regime in Iran as it has been doing in Syria. Iran and Hezbollah in one side and Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia on the other, have been the forces engaged in a proxy war in Syria. Now, if Iran, itself, is the battlefield, one side of this equation would be non-existent. Furthermore, unlike in Syria, where Sunni countries could use Sunnis as their proxy forces, in Iran the Sunnis are but a small minority.

4.2 The Iranian regime response

The Islamic regime, armed with the Revolutionary Guard, the police and the Basij forces do not want to repeat the Shah's mistake of 1979. So the orders were apparently to kill as few demonstrators as possible in order not to fuel the demonstrations in two ways: the funeral would turn itself into a demonstration; and killing demonstrators would create further alienation between the people and the regime.

Then there is the external scapegoat to unite the people with the regime. In a speech on January 2 Ayatollah Khamenei also demonstrated waving "Death to Saudi Arabia" and "Death to America" flags. This was followed by denials; where the commander of the Planning and Budgeting Committee Ja'afari attributed the anti-regime demonstrations to Da'ash, Saudi Arabia, the United States and Israel.

Even if the recent demonstrations have not succeeded in toppling the regime, and apparently they were unable to rise to a national level, the regime will not be what it once was. The public will now be under more surveillance. This will generate a greater pressure pot likely to erupt in further protests. Especially when opponents of the regime notice that an opportunity exists for example, at the future time of Khamenei's death.

5. Views from abroad

It is clear that the regime has and continues to suffer an image blow domestically and internationally, but not much more than that. At the fore of verbal attacks is President Trump of The United States. Perhaps the only practical step has been the cancellation of the French foreign

minister's visit, which was scheduled to take place at the beginning of January 2018, but this might be for concerns for his safety.

5.1 America attacks verbally

In contrast to the riots in 2009, where the Obama administration did not support the protests, this time the US administration under President Trump immediately backed the protests that started in the last days of 2017. The Obama administration turned a blind eye to the Iranian people's call for his help in 2009 so he could negotiate the nuclear deal with the regime. He chose to assure the regime that he would not support the protesters. At the time Iranians shouted "Obama, are you with them or with us".

Now Trump's administration has employed a very different approach. He has shown support for this new wave of protests in Iran. This has created a tension with the Iranian regime. While the American encouragement is only apparently verbal, the characteristics of the riots in Iran demands that any country or government that wants a regime change in Iran should prepare action plans in the event of a recurrence or continuation of the protests. There are therefore those in Iran who want to see a more concrete support from the White House.

No doubt this is in the mind of the White House. Focusing on attempts to prevent nuclear weapons from the Iranian regime is indeed an act in the right direction and is necessary for regional and global security. This can be achieved by assisting the Iranian population to bring about a regime change in Iran. This cannot be achieved just by declarations, but rather in appropriate preparations for a detailed and ongoing plan of action based on cooperation with the Iranian people to establish a democratic regime that respects the rights of its people as well as those of other nations and nations.

5.2 The rest stay silent

Apart from a number of statements made by the American president in support of the Iranian people, there has not been any significant vocal criticism from other countries, especially the Western democratic countries. This may be due to the fact that the main ones, namely Britain, France and Germany, signed the 2015 nuclear agreement and lifted the sanctions on the regime for their own economic considerations. So now any support for the Iranian people might be interpreted as an admission of error if they were to remove the sanctions from the regime and thus

enable it to continue trampling human rights and oppression in Iran, to continue to sow instability and encourage terrorism throughout the Middle East.

Conclusions

In the last days of December 2017 and the first days of January 2018 Iran experienced the most significant wave of protests since the riots that erupted following the 2009 presidential election. These have now abated, but it is too soon to decide if they will not resurface very quickly. Given that they have abated we have expressed a preliminary analysis of the causes, characteristics, scope and responses.

From this it appears that the dire and deteriorating economic situation in Iran seems to constitute most of the fuel supply for the popular protests, but not all the fuel. Political, environmental, governance, religious and other causes seem to join the economic ones, and those helped to the generate the wide urban spread of the demonstrations, namely not only in poor neighborhoods but also in middle and upper middle class ones as well.

We suggest that given such wide spread and diverse participatin in the discontent, the best possibility or option for a meaningful regime change in Iran to suit its population would be not merely through moral support to the protesters. We suggest more meaningful support and cooperation between the truly democratic powers of the world and the protesters inside Iran, where the Iranian opposition outside Iran should be included. Such assistance could be in the shape of providing alternative channels for communication for the protesters, such as technology in the supply of local transmitters, and direction and guidance in efficient protest tactics and resistance, etc.

The Iranian people have expressed repeatedly that they are dissatisfied with the current regime in Iran, a regime that is inflicted with corruption, mismanagement, nepotism, disrespect for basic human rights. It is a regime that through its behavior has not only brought disgrace to Iranians and Iranian passport holders, but also one that has put its own people in most difficult circumstances (such as major economic sanctions) and even dangerous situations (of a military attack on Iran). It is a regime that spends the wealth of the Iranian people on promoting terror, war and instability in the region.

One thing for certain is that there is no doubt that in spite of the harsh and drastic steps taken by the regime in each round of protests since 1979, that the popular opposition movement has continued to survive and even flourish. Thus, as long as this regime remains in power, the discontent will continue, erupting, from time to time, but probably more frequently, into major popular protest, as seen in 1999, 2009 and 2017-18.